

Statement by Ambassador June Persaud, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, before the Commission on Social Development on Agenda Item 3(a)(i): "Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: Priority Theme: Social Services for All"

New York, 10 February 1999

Mr. Chairman,

As I take the floor on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the priority theme of Social Services for all, I will preface my remarks with an acknowledgement of -the wide ranging presentations made yesterday by the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Federico Mayor, and by the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Carol Belamy, on the theme of Basic Education for All. These presentations, together with those of the members of the Expert Panel on the theme of Social Services for All, have provided a rich and stimulating start to the deliberations which will engage the efforts of the Commission over the next days.

As we begin our review of the implementation and follow-up to the decisions of the World Summit for Social Development, the Group of 77 and China welcomes the report of the Secretary General (E/CN.5/1999/2) and the recommendations put forward for advancing the implementation of the Copenhagen Program of Action, as it relates to basic social services. We acknowledge the results oriented approach of the report which promotes ready analysis and projection, and support the improvement of both the quality and the delivery of social services which lies at the core of the recommendations.

Undoubtedly, developing countries remain committed to the improvement of the welfare of their peoples, and governments have assumed the political responsibility for making social services accessible to populations for which they are invariably the primary source of servicing. Not only is there commitment to providing for mainstream populations whose needs are generally known and anticipated, but equally there is awareness and accommodation of the divergent needs of particular groups of people who require specialized social services. This increasingly expanding category includes disadvantaged, vulnerable and under-served groups such as the disabled, the aging and the aged, and mass migratory and displaced populations fleeing natural disasters and civil and international conflicts.

Recognisably, the delivery of social services to all groups, though generally the primary responsibility of Governments, should not be solely dependent on them. The inclusion of a wide range of social actors in the identification of goals and the provision of services, increases the stakeholder base, and involves partners who can participate with the Government in this essential activity. Reliable access to information and informed management of information in the planning and delivery of social services, compliment the partnership and help to create a user-friendly environment in which services can be efficiently accessed.

Mr. Chairman,

The resolve of developing countries to provide basic, quality social services for their populations, is invariably circumscribed by the availability of funds with which to finance servicing. Competing demands on scarce resources in many instances predetermine the capacity of national governments to provide, either individually or in viable partnerships, for all groups, on a sustained and inclusive basis. And there is no amount of political will that can replace the purchasing power of steady funding. Though there is scope for minimizing waste and maximizing efficiency in public expenditure on social services, it is unrealistic to anticipate that resources recycled out of limited national budgets, can alone provide for programmes which are improved in their quality and expanded in their outreach. It follows that the best efforts of developing countries to implement the recommendations of the World Summit as they relate to social services are restricted by their national economic circumstances, and by their recognizably limited capacity to mobilize

external investment. In this context, diminishing ODA levels remain an area of continued concern, the negative effects of which impact crucial sectors such as social services. This together with other factors such as the debt burden, stringent structural adjustment policies, unfavourable terms of trade, and the severe effects of globalization, constrict the capacity of Governments to create the enabling environment necessary for the reliable provision of social services.

The quest of Social Services for All is a responsibility which developing countries have assumed with seriousness and purpose. The Group of 77 and China reaffirms its commitment to the goal of equitable access by all to basic, quality social services, and believes that this goal can be achieved by and for all within the context of an enabling environment and the appropriate political will, at both the national and international levels. In keeping with our collective commitment under the Copenhagen Programme of Action, it is a goal towards which both developing and developed countries strive. Though there is commonness of purpose, we believe that our capacity to arrive at this single destination, together, is dependent on our joint ability to move in genuine partnership with the same speed and agility along the same course. The G-77 and China looks forward to collaborating in this partnership for the implementation of the decisions of the World Summit for Social Development.

Thank you.